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Reminiscences of the Civil War: Andersonville

BY HENRY DEVILLEZ, Leopold, Ind.

I belonged to the Ninety-third Regiment of Indiana Volunteers, Company G. I enlisted the 15th of August, 1862. I served in my regiment until the 10th of June, 1864. I was then captured at Guntown, Mississippi, by General Forrest's Confederate cavalry. From there we were taken to Mobile, Alabama, about three hundred of us. We stayed there in prison about three days. From there we were taken up the Alabama river to Montgomery, Alabama. From Montgomery we were taken by rail to Andersonville.

We arrived at Andersonville about the 18th of June. We were put in the stockade at that place, where we beheld misery on all sides. Sickness and death by hundreds was the program every day. When we got there we thought our fellow prisoners were friends but there were robbers and thieves among them who watched every fresh convoy of prisoners to see what they had worth stealing. However, I was lucky at being robbed by the first soldiers, those who captured me, and was saved going through the ordeal.

I began by hunting for soldiers from Indiana as soon as I got there, which was no easy task, for the prison was so crowded that a man had hardly room to lie down. I found several of the old soldiers who were captured before I was, that were sick and dying.

We began living on one meal a day and that a very poor one. On the Fourth of July we received no rations at all; we were forty-eight hours without eating anything. Being very stout and "hearty" at that time, I began drinking as much water as possible to keep the sides of my stomach from sticking together. No man has more chance to know what hunger is than a prisoner at Andersonville had.

We lived along as best we could until July before anything unusual happened except as before mentioned sickness and death. I have mentioned above about robbers and raiders and will give you two instances of their work. One man who was brought to prison

had a watch in his pocket. The raiders were watching that, and followed him in single file until he got out in the mass of men. The leader said, "I see you have a watch."

"Yes, sir," he replied.

Leader: "Let me see that; I want to see what time it is."

And he took the watch and the man behind him said, "Let me see that," and so it went until the watch was twenty yards from him and he could not find it.

Another instance: One poor prisoner was fortunate enough to have a blanket when he got in prison. The raiders knew it and planned to get it from him. They formed in line just as they had done the man with the watch. The leader took hold of the corner of the blanket and jerked it from the sleeping man. He passed it on to the next man in the rear and so on until it was gone. The victim awoke but the leader knew nothing of the blanket. He said that people were making so much noise that he could not sleep and so by his talk deceived the man so that he did not know where to look for his blanket.

These robberies went on without molestation until the prisoners formed or elected a crew of police or regulators. These regulators were known by the club which each one of them carried. When a man had anything stolen, such as a cup or knife, or probably his day's rations, he complained to one of the regulators. The regulator then arrested the robber and took him before the chief. He was tried and if found guilty was given a number of lashes or gagged for a certain length of time to compensate for his crime. I witnessed the hanging (within the stockade, by prisoners) of six robbers and murderers who had killed and robbed several poor prisoners who, they found, had money in their pockets. The bones and bodies of men were found buried under the places where the robbers had their sleeping quarters.

Inside the stockade there was a line (made by driving stakes down and nailing planks on top of them) known as the "dead line," which was about eighteen feet from the sides of the stockade. No man was allowed to get over this "dead line" or to reach over or under it or get any part of his body beyond it. Now, there was a stream of water on one side just beyond the dead line that could be reached from the inside of the "dead line." But, as I have told the regulations, no man was allowed to reach a drink beyond the line.

I have seen several men killed by the guards for trying to reach the stream over the "dead line." I, myself, narrowly escaped death in that way. I was reaching, for a drink, across the "dead line" and heard somethig "click" above me. Looking up I saw the guard with his gun pointed at me. I immediately jumped back into the crowd and the guard raised his gun. Thus, you see, many of us suffered from thirst, and the water we did get was not fit for a hog to drink.

Thus we lived until Providence came to our relief. Along toward the middle of August, 1864, a spring of good, pure water broke out within the prison. From this time on we did not suffer from bad water or lack of water. There was a constant stream of men going towards the spring. At the spring one of the regulators was stationed to see that each man got his cup filled and passed on out of the way of the others.

Maggots and lice were the torments of the prisoners and I have seen men eaten up by them. If a man was wounded or had a sore of any kind and it was not attended to, the maggots would get into it from the filthy surroundings and kill the victim.

When Sherman captured Atlanta he took many rebel prisoners. The rebels agreed to an exchange of prisoners but Sherman wanted men that had served under him. Well, the officers came to the prisoners and told them they wanted two thousand Sherman prisoners Captain Wirz gave orders that every "flanker" should be shot. My brother and I were "Flankers" that is, not Sherman men, but we got in line and marched out with the other soldiers. We were marched to the railroad not far from the prison, and shipped to Macon, Ga. From there we went to the place of exchange near Atlanta, Ga. We then formed a line and Union men rode along in front of the line and called out names from a list of Sherman's lost men. I was found to be a "Flanker," so was my brother, and nearly half of the remainder of the two thousand. When the rebels saw this the exchange was stopped.

They then shipped us to Macon, Georgia, from Macon to Savannah, from there to Camp Loden or Mallon. From Mallon we were taken to Blackshear, Georgia, from Blackshear to Thomasville, Georgia, from Thomasville, Georgia, we marched across the country to Albany, Georgia, from Albany we were loaded on the train and were taken back to Andersonville.

When we arrived at Andersonville we were counted off in de-

tachments of 270 and each detachment divided into three companies of ninety. I was at the head of ninety and the man at my side James Lang from Ohio said, "Frenchy, it is getting very cold and we will need a fire tonight. You try to get that piece of wood over there," pointing to a small piece of wood.

Captain Wirz was walking down the line with his back turned to me, but he turned in time to see me out of line. He came back to me with a pistol in his hand. He held it close to my head and said, "You G— D— Yankee S— of a B—, if you don't stand still, I'll blow your brains out. I had my dinner and I can stand it, but you didn't have any." These words will ring in my ears to my dying day.

We were rushed into prison again to suffer from cold and hunger the remainder of the winter. Words can not describe the suffering and misery I underwent and saw others undergo that winter. We were kept here until the war was over and then shipped to Jacksonville, Florida, where we were released.

To tell all my experiences in this "Hell upon earth" would require a whole volume, therefore, I have only touched upon prison life and I leave it to the reader to judge whether or not what I have said is enough.